



Bishop George Rajendran SDB
Diocese of Thuckalay

Mobile: +919443281100
Email: bpgeorgerajendran@gmail.com

BISHOP'S HOUSE
P.B. No. 12, Thuckalay P.O.
Kanyakumari District
Tamilnadu – 629175, India
Phone: +91-4651-250633
Diocese Email: thuckalaydiocese@yahoo.com

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Dear and Reverend Fathers,

Greetings from Bishop's House, Thuckalay!

We began the holy season of Lent on 27 February 2017 with the imposition of Ashes on our foreheads. It is time of fasting, praying and almsgiving. While we instruct our people to observe this holy season with great devotion, it is opportune that we too reflect upon the importance of this season in our priestly lives. Immersed in our pastoral work, it is possible that we can forget the observance of Lent in our lives. As you are aware, every year, the Holy Father issues a message during the season of Lent in order to exhort the faithful on the importance of this holy season that provides ample opportunities for experiencing the person of Jesus Christ. This year, the message was released on 7 February 2017. On 26th February we reflected the same in the form of my Pastoral letter to the faithful in Tamil and Malayalam. Now I am presenting the same text of the Holy Father for our own personal reading and reflection. It is entitled: "The Word is a gift. Other persons are a gift." The brief message has three sections, namely, the other person is a gift, sin blinds us and the Word is a gift.

Pope Francis' message for Lent 2017

Lent is a favourable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and alms giving. At the basis of everything is the Word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply. I would now like to consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (cf. Lk 16:19-31). Let us find inspiration in this meaningful story, for it provides a key to understanding what we need to do in order to attain true happiness and eternal life. It exhorts us to sincere conversion.

1. The other person is a gift

The parable begins by presenting its two main characters. The poor man is described in greater detail: he is wretched and lacks the strength even to stand. Lying before the door of the rich man, he fed on the crumbs falling from his table. His body is full of sores and dogs come to lick his wounds (cf. vv. 20-21). The picture is one of great misery; it portrays a man disgraced and pitiful.

The scene is even more dramatic if we consider that the poor man is called Lazarus: a name full of promise, which literally means "God helps". This character is not anonymous. His features are clearly delineated and he appears as an individual with his own story. While practically invisible to the rich man, we see and know him as someone familiar. He becomes a face, and as such, a gift, a priceless treasure, a human being whom God loves and cares for, despite his concrete condition as an outcast (cf. Homily, 8 January 2016).

Lazarus teaches us that other persons are a gift. A right relationship with people consists in gratefully recognizing their value. Even the poor person at the door of the rich is not a nuisance, but a summons to conversion and to change. The parable first invites us to open the doors of our heart to others because each person is a gift, whether it is our neighbour or an anonymous pauper. Lent is a favourable season for opening the doors to all those in need and recognizing in them the face of Christ. Each of us meets people like this every day. Each life that we encounter is a gift deserving acceptance, respect and love. The word of God helps us to open our eyes to welcome and love life, especially when it is weak and vulnerable. But in order to do this, we have to take seriously what the Gospel tells us about the rich man.

2. Sin blinds us

The parable is unsparing in its description of the contradictions associated with the rich man (cf. v. 19). Unlike poor Lazarus, he does not have a name; he is simply called "a rich man". His opulence was seen in his extravagant and expensive robes. Purple cloth was even more precious than silver and gold, and was thus reserved to divinities (cf. Jer 10:9) and kings (cf. Jg 8:26), while fine linen gave one an almost sacred character. The man was clearly ostentatious about his wealth, and in the habit of displaying it daily: "He feasted sumptuously every day" (v. 19). In him we can catch a dramatic glimpse of the corruption of sin, which progresses in three successive stages: love of money, vanity and pride (cf. Homily, 20 September 2013).

The Apostle Paul tells us that "the love of money is the root of all evils" (1 Tim 6:10). It is the main cause of corruption and a source of envy, strife and suspicion. Money can come to dominate us, even to the point of becoming a tyrannical idol (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 55). Instead of being an instrument at our service for doing good and showing solidarity towards others, money can chain us and the entire world to a selfish logic that leaves no room for love and hinders peace.

The parable then shows that the rich man's greed makes him vain. His personality finds expression in appearances, in showing others what he can do. But his appearance masks an interior emptiness. His life is a prisoner to outward appearances, to the most superficial and

fleeting aspects of existence (cf. *ibid.*, 62). The lowest rung of this moral degradation is pride. The rich man dresses like a king and acts like a god, forgetting that he is merely mortal. For those corrupted by love of riches, nothing exists beyond their own ego. Those around them do not come into their line of sight. The result of attachment to money is a sort of blindness. The rich man does not see the poor man who is starving, hurting, lying at his door. Looking at this character, we can understand why the Gospel so bluntly condemns the love of money: “No one can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money” (Mt 6:24).

3. The Word is a gift

The Gospel of the rich man and Lazarus help us to make a good preparation for the approach of Easter. The liturgy of Ash Wednesday invites us to an experience quite similar to that of the rich man. When the priest imposes the ashes on our heads, he repeats the words: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”. As it turned out, the rich man and the poor man both died, and the 20 greater part of the parable takes place in the afterlife. The two characters suddenly discover that “we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it” (1 Tim 6:7).

We too see what happens in the afterlife. There the rich man speaks at length with Abraham, whom he calls “father” (Lk 16:24.27), as a sign that he belongs to God’s people. This detail makes his life appear all the more contradictory, for until this moment there had been no mention of his relation to God. In fact, there was no place for God in his life. His only god was himself.

The rich man recognizes Lazarus only amid the torments of the afterlife. He wants the poor man to alleviate his suffering with a drop of water. What he asks of Lazarus is similar to what he could have done but never did. Abraham tells him: “During your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus had his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony” (v. 25). In the afterlife, a kind of fairness is restored and life’s evils are balanced by good.

The parable goes on to offer a message for all Christians. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, who are still alive. But Abraham answers: “They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them” (v. 29). Countering the rich man’s objections, he adds: “If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead” (v. 31).

The rich man's real problem thus comes to the fore. At the root of all his ills was the failure to heed God's word. As a result, he no longer loved God and grew to despise his neighbour. The word of God is alive and powerful, capable of converting hearts and leading them back to God. When we close our heart to the gift of God's word, we end up closing our heart to the gift of our brothers and sisters.

Dear friends, Lent is the favourable season for renewing our encounter with Christ, living in His word, in the sacraments and in our neighbour. The Lord, who overcame the deceptions of the Tempter during the forty days in the desert, shows us the path we must take. May the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion, so that we can rediscover the gift of God's word, be purified of the sin that blinds us, and serve Christ present in our brothers and sisters in need. I encourage all the faithful to express this spiritual renewal also by sharing in the Lenten Campaigns promoted by many Church organizations in different parts of the world, and thus to favour the culture of encounter in our one human family. Let us pray for one another so that, by sharing in the victory of Christ, we may open our doors to the weak and poor. Then we will be able to experience and share to the full the joy of Easter.

Let us heed to the inspiring message of the Pope and enter into this holy season of Lent with great fervour and devotion.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Doctoral Defence of Rev. Fr. John (Joshy) Kulathumkal: Rev. Fr. Joshy Kulathumkal defended his doctoral thesis on 28 February 2017 at Venice. The title of his thesis is *The Contribution of CCEO to the Inter-ecclesial Territorial Collaboration among the Bishops in the Collegial Form and its Application in India*. The thesis is a study based on canon 322 of the Oriental Code of Canon Law, which speaks about the *Assemblies of Hierarchs of several Churches Sui iuris*. Fr. Joshy also studied other related canons, which offer juridical support to the collaboration among the bishops of different *Sui iuris* Churches, including Latin Church. Oriental Code proposes different areas where the collaboration is possible among different ritual Churches such as inter-ecclesial seminary, common formation, inter-ecclesial tribunal, inter-ecclesial catechetical commission, uniformity in the penal laws, taxes and offerings, collaboration in premarital enquiry, etc. The study takes into account the two fundamental principles, namely, Communion of the Churches and the Episcopal Collegiality. The study, in its final part, makes a critical evaluation of the functioning of the two institutionalized collegial organs for the inter-ecclesial collaboration among the bishops in India: CBCI at the national levels and KCBC at the regional level. The study, by evaluating the existing collaboration among the bishops in India, proposes some suggestions in the light

of *CCEO* for better unity and collaboration among the bishops of three *Sui iuris* Churches in India - Latin, Syro Malabar and Syro Malankara.

Requiem Qurbana for Msgr. Philip Kodiyanthara: The fourth death anniversary of Msgr. Philip Kodiyanthara was kept in the eparchy with the celebration of Holy Qurbana and Office of the Dead at Sacred Heart Forane Church, Padanthalumoodu on 9 February 2017 at 6 pm. Most of the priests, religious and faithful of the eparchy participated and prayed for the departed soul. Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam, Proto-Syncellus of the eparchy, led the liturgical celebrations.

The representatives of the eparchy also joined with the family members of Msgr. Philip Kodiyanthara for the fourth death anniversary Qurbana at Kayalpuram, Kerala, on 10 February 2017. Thirteen Fathers, many Sisters and Christian faithful from our eparchy participated. Msgr. Joseph Mundakathil, Proto-Syncellus of the Archeparchy of Changanacherry, presided over the Holy Qurbana. Rev. Fr. Jose Muttathupadam, Proto-Syncellus of the eparchy, celebrated the office of the dead at the tomb of Msgr. Philip Kodiyanthara. I thank all of you for taking all the troubles to make the liturgical ceremonies in honour of Msgr. Philip Kodiyanthara meaningful with your fervent prayers and participation.

National Conference at St Alphonsa College: The Department of Commerce of St Alphonsa College organised a National Conference on 10 February 2017. I was the chief guest. Dr. Eugene Francis, Head of the Department of Commerce at St. Xavier College, Palayamkottai, was the guest of honor. He delivered the keynote address. The seminar was well conducted and many students from various Colleges attended. Many Professors and Lecturers from other Colleges and Universities from Tamil Nadu and other States participated in the Conference. I congratulate the Correspondent, Principal, members of the staff and students of the College for organizing it. I am happy that other Departments are organising similar seminars and conferences at the College level.

The Visitors from *Oeuvre d'Orient*, Paris: Mr. Dominique and Mrs. Isabelle from the Church Organization called *Oeuvre d'Orient*, Paris visited our eparchy from 13 to 15 February 2017. They visited those parishes that they support financially, namely, St. Francis Assisi Church Mezhacode, St. Martin de Pores Church, Kazhuvanthittai, St. Maria Goretti Church, Athencode and Little Flower Forane Church, Manjalumoodu. They also visited our Minor Seminary Mukkoottukal, DNN Karode and *Karunai Illam*, Nithravilai. I want to thank in a special way Rev. Fr. Dency Mundunadackal, eparchial procurator, and Rev. Fr. Thankachan sdb, mission procure, for taking care of them during their visit.

Rev. Sr. Mercy ASMI Elected Superior General of ASMI Congregation: Rev. Sr. Mercy ASMI is elected Superior General of ASMI Congregation on 9 February 2017. She was working as Superior of Nithravailai Convent and Principal of *Karunai Illam*, Nithravailai at the time of her election. I congratulate Rev. Sr. Mercy on her election. I express my gratitude for her dedicated service in *Karunai Illam* for 22 years. The eparchy of Thuckalay had also honoured her for her missionary service by giving the *Sevai Chemmal* Award on 8 November 2017. Since she wanted to go to the Generalate house of ASMI at Changanassery, Rev. Fr. Christudas organised a farewell gathering for her at *Karunai Illam* on 15 February 2017. Together with many Fathers and Sisters, I was present for the programme to express joy and gratitude at her elevation. Let us continue to pray for her that the good Lord may shower his blessings upon her for the fruitful discharge of her ministry in the ASMI Congregation.

KKSSS Collection in Nagercoil City: Kanyakumari Social Service Society organized a One-day Bucket Collection in Nagercoil City for the upliftment of the Palliative Care of the eparchy. Many of our priests, sisters, staff and animators of KKSSS and a number of our faithful were involved in the Bucket Collection. They were able to collect some money from the shops and people of the town. I appreciate and congratulate all those who participated in this mission. I thank Rev. Fr. Saji Elambasseril sdb and his team for organizing the programme and Rev. Fr. Thomas Powathuparampil for providing food to the participants.

Orientation Programme for Priests: As I have mentioned to you, on 20 and 21 March 2017 there will be orientation programme for all the Fathers of the Eparchy. As we are immersed in pastoral work and care of the souls, it is important that we give some time for our on-going formation. Hence, I am asking you to set aside all the responsibilities of the Parishes and institutions on those two days and be present for the orientation programme.

The programme begins on 20th March at 9.00 am and will end on 21st March by 3.00 pm with the Priests' Conference. Kindly, postpone all your programmes including the Holy Qurbana on 21st March. I wish that all of you stay overnight in Sangamam because the programme will conclude only at 9.00 pm on 20th March. On the next day, it will begin with the Holy Qurbana at 6.15 am. If any one wishes to go, please make sure that you reach Sangamam for the concelebrated Holy Qurbana on 21st March.

Rev. Fr. Gnanadas from the Diocese of Ooty will animate the programme. He will deal with relevant topics concerning our pastoral ministry and priestly life.

Solemn Blessing and Inauguration of Sinai Retreat Centre: The work at the Retreat Centre is going on in full swing and we hope to complete it within two months. I have invited our dear Major Archbishop Cardinal Mar George Alencherry for the blessing and inauguration and Bro. Maria Joseph Suleiman, from Muringoor Retreat Centre, for the classes. Both have agreed to come. We have fixed the date for the blessing on 7th May 2017. In our next Priests' Conference we shall discuss the details of the programme.

Adieu Rev. Fr. Siju Puthenpurayil: For the last three years, Rev. Fr. Siju served our eparchy in various capacities. He was the Parish Priest of Pathukani and Anumugam and also the Director of Home Mission in the eparchy. We gave a fitting farewell to him on 16 February 2017 during the Priests' Conference. Rev. Fr. Mijo Puthenpurayil delivered the words of appreciation. I thanked Fr. Siju for his selfless and dedicated ministry in the eparchy. Rev. Fr. Siju is transferred to Ramanathapuram Diocese in Coimbatore.

INFORMATION

Episcopal Ordination of Rev. Fr. Thomas Tharayil, New Auxiliary Bishop of Changanacherry: The Bishop-elect Rev. Fr. Thomas Tharayil visited Bishop's House, Thuckalay on 7 February 2017. He welcomed all the priests, religious and faithful of our eparchy for his episcopal ordination on Sunday, 23 April 2017 on the premises of the Cathedral Church Changanacherry at 2 pm. The Curia members along some priests and staff of the Bishop's House were present and welcomed him solemnly. A short felicitation was also arranged in the refectory while lunch was going on.

Internet Mission: Rev. Fr. Joby Maprakavil MST, Executive Director of Syro-Malabar Church Internet Mission, Mount St Thomas, Kakkannad, informed us that Syro-Malabar Church Internet Mission is making mobile application for all the Dioceses, Commissions, Committees, Departments, Congregations, Institutions and Parishes of Syro-Malabar Church. It will be ready within months. Through this app we will be able to have link with them. This app will function as Syro-Malabar Directory and also as a medium for sending messages. He requested us not to make any mobile app with the help of any outsider. He expects our co-operation and support. Let us all remain united through one app, which will be of great use to all of us.

Lenten Collection: This year, the Lenten collection from all our parishes and institutions will go towards the expenses of Palliative Care Unit that KKSSS runs. I am sure, you have already received *Undials* from the KKSSS. I request you to make our faithful aware of

importance of the Lenten *Undial* collection and to encourage them to contribute generously towards the upkeep of the Palliative Care Unit, which looks after the bedridden persons within the territory of the eparchy of Thuckalay.

Your Valuable Prayers are requested for:

- Rev. Fr. Saji Elambasseril sdb, who is admitted in the Caritas Hospital Kottayam and is operated for Neurofibroma. Now he is resting in Salesian community at Puthuppalli
- Rev. Fr. Felix Arulnathan sdb for his speedy recovery. He is back in the eparchy.
- Christ Central School, Anchugramam has applied for CBSE affiliation and the process is in the final stages.
- Rev. Fr. Johnsilal's Father, who is diagnosed with Cancer.
- Rev. Mother Mariamma FCC, who was seriously ill a few weeks ago. She had a minor stroke and as a result one side was paralysed. She is now undergoing physiotherapy.
- Rev. Sr. Christella SABS fractured her left shoulder and admitted in Holy Cross Hospital.

More Particular Laws of the Eparchy of Thuckalay: The Diocese is planning to codify the more particular laws regarding our eparchy for better organising of its activities. The first meeting for the codification of "More Particular Laws of the Eparchy of Thuckalay" was held on 23 February 2017 in the Evuprasiamma Hall, Bishop's House. Rev. Fr. Sathianesan is appointed to head the team and Rev. Fr. Mathew Kuzhinjalil and Rev. Fr. Dency Mundunadackal are the other members. We wish the team all the best!

Appointment of Judge of the Apostolic Tribunal Roman Rota: Pope Francis has appointed His Eminence Oswald Cardinal Gracias, Archbishop of Mumbai, as Judge of the Apostolic Tribunal Roman Rota (*Rotae Romanae*) at Rome.

Requirements for receiving Messages from the Major Archbishop: A copy of requirements for receiving Messages from the Major Archbishop is enclosed with this Priests' circular. Please remember the requirements when you request messages from the Major Archbishop.

Catholic Newspaper: At the diocesan level, we have already some publications to our credits: *Iraiarul*, *Sinai*, *Sirumalar*, etc. Now we are taking another initiative. Under the leadership of Rev. Fr. Joseph Santhosh, we are planning to publish a monthly newspaper with the aim of reaching out to all Catholics in our District and later in our State. The newspaper

will focus on deepening the Christian Faith in our families. We shall begin with free distribution and later look for subscriptions.

Condolences: The elder brother of Rev. Fr. Vinod Kanakalil passed away on 24 February 2017. We express our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and pray for the departed soul. He leaves behind his three children.

Construction Works in the Diocese:

- The construction of Kaliyal Parish Church is in progress.
- The construction of the new Church at Plankalai is in progress.
- The construction work of the new Church at Athencode is going on.
- The construction of the second floor of St. Alphonsa College has begun.
- The SABS Sisters are constructing a women's hostel adjacent to our College. The work is in progress
- The second floor of Sangamam is nearing completion. We are planning to renovate the garden and the reception area.
- Extension work of DNN is going on
- We blessed the foundation stone for a new Church at Thakkalivilai on 26 February 2017. The construction work is in progress.
- The CMC Provincial house construction is nearing completion and its solemn blessing will be in May, 2017.

Annual Report of Departments: I request all the directors of the various departments and pious associations to submit their annual report of activities with account details on 25 April 2017

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

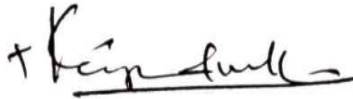
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| 05 March 2017 | - Charity Cover Collection is to be done in the Parishes. Celebration of World Women's Day in our eparchial Parishes |
| 08 March 2017 | - World Women's Day |
| 14 March 2017 | - Inter Diocesan Meet at Kanjirapally |
| 17-19 March 2017 | - Pre-Marriage Course at Sangamam |
| 19 March 2017 | - Feast of St Joseph |
| 20-21 March 2017 | - Orientation Programme for Priests Animator: Rev. Fr. Gnanadas, Ooty Diocese |

CONCLUSION

Lent is a time of grace and let us make every effort to bring the fruits of this season not only in ourselves but also among our people for whom we have dedicated our lives. It is also the season of examinations. Our children in our various institutions are preparing for their final examinations. I suggest that you organise special Holy Qurbana for their intentions and bless them so that they are spiritually prepared to write the examinations.

I take this occasion to wish you a fruitful season of Lent!
With my prayers and blessings,

Yours in Christ Jesus,



+George Rajendran SDB
Bishop of Thuckalay

